

October 2023

VOICES

WOMEN & YOUTH NEWSLETTER



Women and youth experiences from the 2023 Elections





 INSTITUTE for YOUNG WOMEN'S DEVELOPMENT
 

 Zimbabwe Gender Commission
 
 Women's Institute for Leadership Development
 
 WOMEN'S COALITION OF ZIMBABWE
 
 YETT
 
 GENDER LINKS FOR EQUALITY AND JUSTICE



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Celebrating women & youth voices

Elections, post-elections and key commemorative days

Words from Hivos Communications

Welcome to the October 2023 edition of the Voices Newsletter, where we celebrated the women and youth that we work with through our various programs. As we reflect on the recent August 2023 season in Zimbabwe, it is clear that women and youth played a critical role in shaping the outcome.

Through the Women and Youth Inclusion for Equality (WYI4E) project, implemented by Hivos and its partners - Women Coalition of Zimbabwe (WCoZ), Women's Institute for Leadership Development (WILD), Youth Empowerment and Transformation Trust (YETT), Gender Links, General Agriculture and Plantation Workers' Union of Zimbabwe (Gapwuz) and Zimbabwe Gender Commission - we have seen firsthand the power of empowering marginalized communities to participate fully in democratic processes.

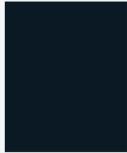
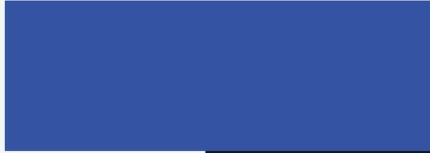
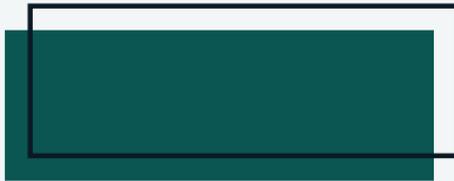
Through this newsletter, we aim to showcase the

challenges, inspiration, successes from different women voice during the elections. We also take a look at work being done post-election period and how we are moving and forging new paths.

We urge everyone to embrace the power of unity, inclusivity, and solidarity as we work towards a future where all voices are heard, all aspirations are nurtured, and all barriers are dismantled.

We also feature material from our partners in the Women's Voices Matter and Women and Youth Leadership and Participation projects. These include the Institute of Young Women's Development (IYWD) and Government of Zimbabwe.

Our projects are funded by the European Union in Zimbabwe and the Embassy of Ireland in Pretoria. Your comments and suggestions on the stories featured in this edition will be greatly appreciated.



#GirlPower



Day of the Girl Child

In October, we held a film screening and discussion of the documentary *Girl Rising*, which was attended by girls from the Harare Junior Council, and Shamwari yeMwanasikana and Hivos staff in celebration of International Day of the Girl Child.

Post-election healing for women in politics



The 2023 Zimbabwean Harmonized Elections were quite challenging for women in politics. While party engagements had suggested we would see more women standing for election, the reality didn't translate.

There was a drop in participation and election of women candidates between 2018 and 2023. The journey to political leadership is a big challenge for women, who face unique obstacles such as gender bias, discrimination and violence.

In response, Hivos, partnered with Institute for Young Women's Development (IYWD) to host a two-day post-election elections debrief workshop for women who participated in the polls. The workshop aimed to provide psycho-social support, create a safe space and facilitate network alliances for both elected candidates and those who were not successful in the elections.

The workshop brought together over 50 women from various political parties, providing a platform for them to share their experiences and empower one another. Participants discussed the challenges they faced during their election period, including intimidation, financial constraints and patriarchal attitudes that hindered their campaigns.

Women present at the workshop also shared stories of resilience, determination, and solidarity, highlighting the importance of sisterhood and collective action in the face of adversity.

One of the participants, Linda Masarira – president of the LEAD party, shared her experience of being threatened and harassed. "My first arrest in Mutare, the police came with dogs just to arrest one person, it has been a tough journey, but I refused to give up," she said.

"I knew that I had to stand up for myself and my party, especially the women and girls who have been in the same situation."

Her story resonated with many in the room, sparking a lively discussion on the need for more women in leadership positions and the importance of supporting one another.

Another participant, Lynette Karenyi, spoke about the significance of supporting the women's movement.

"We need to uplift each other and protect each other for the growth of women in politics," she emphasized. "By working together, we can achieve so much more than we can alone."

This sentiment was echoed throughout the workshop, with participants expressing a desire for greater collaboration and standing with each other in politics.

The workshop also featured sessions on stress management and self-care, encouraging women to have other modes of income besides politics, and addressing the psychological impact of political participation and the need for mental wellness. Participants engaged in group activities, such as dancing, mindfulness exercises, designed to promote relaxation and inner peace.

The elections debrief workshop served as a powerful reminder of the critical role that women play in shaping Zimbabwe's future.

By creating a safe space for women to share their experiences and connect with one another, the workshop fostered a sense of unity and purpose among participants despite their different background and parties.

Voting for the first time

My name is Benjamin, and I am a first-time voter and a student at the University of Zimbabwe. As the leader of the National Movement of Catholic Students (NMCS), I was engaged by Hivos partner – Youth Empowerment and Transformation Trust (YETT) – to share youth voter information and coordinate youth voter dialogue, targeting young people in churches. While conversations about electoral processes are often scarce in religious communities, YETT empowered and inspired NMCS to facilitate discussions among young people. These conversations helped foster interest in participating in electoral processes, as evidenced by the enthusiastic sharing of election-related updates in our social media groups.

On the morning of 23 August 2023, I felt a sense of pride and responsibility as a young adult and citizen of Zimbabwe. I was thrilled to witness numerous young people patiently queuing up to exercise their right to vote. My excitement stemmed from the fact that my efforts to encourage fellow youths to participate in the electoral process were yielding positive results.

Although there were some notable irregularities during the voting process, such as delayed openings of polling stations and difficulties in locating names on the voters' roll, I remained determined to cast my vote. After verifying my identity with the polling officials, I received my ballot paper and cast my vote confidentially, peacefully, and with conviction. Despite the setbacks, it was heartening to observe that many young people remained committed to exercising their democratic rights.

In conclusion, casting my first vote was an incredible experience, and I sincerely hope that the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission will continually work towards improving the electoral processes, making them more accessible and inclusive for all eligible citizens. Moreover, I look forward to seeing improved living conditions, lower tuition fees, and enhanced collaboration between the student body and administrative authorities.



The uphill battle to be a Councilor

On the 23rd of August all roads led to the polling stations in Zimbabwe, Khalazani Ndlovu – the aspiring Councilor for Bulawayo Ward 10 – faced a number of challenges, highlighting the difficulties that women face when running for office.

On the eve of Election Day, when she went to check the ballot boxes at the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) Bulawayo provincial offices, Ndlovu discovered there were no local authority ballot boxes.

"I went to the ZEC offices in Famona to check the ballot boxes and I found the Presidential and National Assembly ballot boxes there, but I was told the local authority ballot boxes would not arrive until later in the day. It was painful and what made me angrier was all of this was happening at the 11th hour," she said.

Ndlovu, who was now anxious, says she gathered courage and went to enquire with ZEC officials who referred her to a colleague in charge of ballot box deliveries. This is when they notified her there were four candidates in her Ward.

"The voting process started at 9am at some of the polling stations in my Ward because of the late delivery of local authority ballot boxes. I was relieved to see my name on the ballot with

other candidates considering the effort I had put campaigning to be a councilor and the vision that I had to develop my community," she said.

Ndlovu also highlighted the difficulties that women face when running for office, noting that on Election Day, she had to ensure polling agents were fed and her contribution to the budget came from her own personal savings.

"If you do not have resources as a woman candidate, it is not easy. I was strained because I was using my salary and personal savings to fund my campaign and ensure polling agents had food," she said.

Ndlovu, now an elected Councilor, urged other women to be bold and resilient when running for office and called for more financing and support for women candidates.

"Running for office as woman candidates needs one to be confident and bold. I faced name calling and I was stressed and strained financially and emotionally. There is a need for more financing and support for women candidates, and for greater recognition of the important role that women play in shaping the future of Zimbabwe. Advocacy must start at community level championing against gender stereotypes and biases for enhanced women's political participation," said Ndlovu.

Councilor
Manzvimbo



Women Politicians in Seke Seek Support

Councilor Manzvimbo of Seke has shed light on the challenges faced by women in politics during a recent interview. Despite women constituting the majority of the voters' roll in the area, their participation in electoral processes, in different political parties, remains limited.

Councilor Manzvimbo lamented the lack of financial support from political parties, placing women at a disadvantage as they often have to rely on their own resources to campaign effectively. She highlighted a concerning absence of non-governmental organizations in their areas, leaving women with limited access to critical support and resources.

"Being a woman in politics is no easy task," she explained. "We face hate speech, physical, and psychological abuse. This makes political involvement a cumbersome and less-than-ideal option for married women."

The lack of support from stakeholders has further exacerbated these issues, leaving many aspiring female politicians without the necessary tools to compete in the political arena. In the recent elections, only two women in Seke Constituency contested, underscoring the need for more substantial support for women interested in political leadership roles.

Looking towards the future, Councilor Manzvimbo expressed hope that women would receive the support and capacity-building they desperately require. She emphasized the importance of diversifying support, suggesting that it should not be limited to the same women each time.

As the call for greater support for women in politics and a more inclusive voters' roll grows louder, stakeholders and organizations are urged to take proactive measures to address these issues and promote women's active involvement in Zimbabwean politics.

A Young Woman Voter's Experience through the Delays and Determination

About 6.5 million out of an estimated 15.5 million people were registered to vote in Zimbabwe's ninth election which was conducted on the 23rd of August 2023. It is crucial to note that a sixth of these registered voters were first-time voters.

Youth participation in the electoral process is crucial for building a representative democracy, empowering young voters and most importantly, first-time voter.

Zvikomborero, one of Hivos' partner Institute for Young Women's Development's (IYWD) Munhanga Girls Club, was filled with excitement and a sense of responsibility as she eagerly set out to exercise her democratic right for the first time.

"I am a young girl from Bindura Rural. I am proud to have voted for the first time in my life and I came to understand that youth participation in the electoral process is crucial in ensuring that Government officials represent the will of the people," she said.

Zvikomborero, as she echoed her experience, emphasized that participating in the electoral process can lead to more informed voting decisions. She added, "I also realized that participation of young people in politics extends to engaging in political debates, policy-making, and even holding political office".

Zvikomborero highlighted that in the

early hours of 23 August 2023, the streets were buzzing as citizens made their way to various polling stations.

However, as the day wore on, signs of irregularities began to surface. Rumbly amongst the crowd revealed that ballot papers for the local authority had not arrived at many polling stations, including the polling station where Zvikomborero was casting her vote. Panic started to spread.

As the sun set, there was anxiety and frustration. Ballot papers arrived at Zvikomborero's polling station around 6pm.

"My heart sank, realizing that the situation would warrant me missing my chance to vote as my parents kept calling for me to come back home early and not risk being attacked or raped on my way back home at night," she said. The irregularities and delays seemed to have eroded the hope that had once shone so brightly.

As described by Zvikomborero, the late arrival of ballot papers meant that most would give up on their dreams of participating in the electoral process. However, she persevered. She finally voted around 8pm.

"Waiting that long to cast my vote made me appreciate the value of my vote," she said. "I will never forget my first time voting and the challenges I had to overcome to make my voice count".

Make inclusion of persons with disabilities in elections a reality!



Cynthia Dube and her husband Everton



Tariro Gurure

The participation of persons with disabilities (PWDs) in political and public life is explicitly guaranteed by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which Zimbabwe is a signatory to.

Article 29 of the convention provides that State parties shall guarantee PWDs political rights and the opportunity to enjoy them on an equal basis with others and shall undertake to ensure that voting procedures, facilities, and materials are appropriate, accessible, easy to understand and use. Furthermore, it protects the right of persons with disabilities to vote by secret ballot and to stand for office and effectively hold office.

In past elections, PWDs have primarily been marginalized from being voter educators, polling officers, observers, and even candidates in the electoral process.

Tariro Gurure, an inclusion and disabilities activist, is one of the PWDs who defied all barriers in the 2023 Harmonized Elections, and not only exercised her right to vote, but also participated as an observer.

"I was excited to exercise my constitutional right to vote. Everything went well for me as a voter and observer. The presiding officer at my polling station was very helpful and made my work as an observer easy. It was a beautiful experience. I did get fatigued, but I understood it was part of the process," said Tariro. She added that she hoped the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) would prioritize inclusion of PWDs in electoral processes.

"I certainly hope that in future elections, we can treat the issues of PWDs with importance, to ensure their political participation. Specifically, on having braille or tactile ballots so that there is no voter apathy and the visually impaired are guaranteed their right to

vote by secret ballot," said Tariro.

"People voted but still don't know the Wards or constituencies they belong to because of delimitation. Information must be disseminated early."

In Matobo District, in Matabeleland North, Cynthia Dube faced accessibility challenges and expressed her hope that ZEC in the next election would have a polling station closer to the road and accessible to PWDs.

"I had to assist my husband, who uses a wheelchair, to the polling station, which is located 3-4 km away from our homestead. In the previous year, the polling station was closer to the road, making it easy for people with disabilities and assistants to access the polling station. However, this year, because of the delimitation process, the polling station is situated far from the road, making it hard for people with disabilities to come alone to cast their votes. We struggled to reach the polling station because the road is rocky and full of potholes," she said.

Despite the challenge, Cynthia and her husband faced she said "I am happy we managed to cast our votes without a challenge. ZEC polling officers prioritized people with disabilities and put them in front of the queue, ensuring that they cast their vote without any delays."

As Zimbabwe continues to work towards building a more inclusive society, the needs of people with disabilities must be taken into account. By making polling stations more accessible and ensuring that people with disabilities get the support they need to cast their votes, Tariro and Cynthia's experiences serve as a reminder that every vote counts and highlight the importance of ensuring everyone, regardless of their physical abilities, has access to the democratic process.



Shelly Njerere

Fighting youth voter apathy

My name is Shelly Njerere from Masvingo and I am a youth champion who participated in my first vote campaign by Hivos partner Youth Empowerment and Transformation Trust (YETT). As a youth champion, my duty was to encourage youth participation in elections. I was a mobile observer, which meant observing in many polling stations. What I found interesting was the number of young people queued at different polling stations.

Prior to my exposure to youth participation in electoral processes, I had zero interest in participation in electoral processes, not to mention vote casting. I used to believe elections are overrated and a waste of time. To the best of my knowledge, elections had failed to address my needs as a young person and the needs of my peers.

However, when I started engaging in YETT programs, I was happy to be an active young lady encouraging her peers to participate in electoral processes.

My election observer experience is very interesting. I arrived at the first polling station at 06:30am. There were no recorded abnormalities at my first polling station. I also enjoyed the privileges that came with being a mobile observer, imagine skipping the line and getting first preference to vote. It's like I was a celebrity for the day and polling officers would update me on any changes, for example the reasons for turning away voters.

The polling stations closed after everyone had voted and I participated in the counting session. The counting was tiring and took a long time but I loved the experience.

In my opinion, the elections were peaceful but it was worrying to see some youths and elderly people returning home without voting because they couldn't find their names in the voter's roll. My hopes are to see more young people voting, observing and being presiding officers. I look forward to supporting my fellow youth Mayoress Shantel Chiwara who is the youngest Mayor of Masvingo at 25 years.

I can positively confirm that my journey to vote casting was inspired by my exposure to YETT programs on electoral processes. I gained more knowledge on elections in Zimbabwe that influenced my decision to participate and actively share gained knowledge with my peers to encourage youth voter participation. As a youth champion, I will continue to encourage my peers to participate in civic and electoral processes.

Reflections of a #VoteRunLeadReloaded Candidate

Despite Zimbabwe being a signatory to international instruments that support gender equality, women are still significantly underrepresented in politics. Zimbabwe failed to make significant progress in enhancing women's representation in the 23 August 2023 Harmonized Elections.

In the National Assembly, there were 70 female candidates – compared with 637 men across the 210 constituencies, comprising 11% of candidates – down from 14% in 2018. The decline of women's representation and participation reverses the gains made over time towards gender equality.

Catherine Mahachi, one of the #VoteRunLeadReloaded candidates contested successfully in the elections as a councillor for Zanu PF Ward 11 Muzarabani in Mashonaland Central.

Despite women making up the majority of the electorate, their representation in Government remains dismally low.

“This is frustrating because I believe young women and women have so much to offer in terms of fresh perspectives, unique experiences, and much-needed diversity of opinion,” bemoaned Catherine.

Months before the elections, Catherine began her campaign preparations with immense determination. She assembled a dedicated team of volunteers who shared

her vision for a brighter future.

“Together with my team, we spent months canvassing our community, knocking on doors, and speaking with citizens about their concerns. We attended countless meetings, rallies, and forums, listening to people's grievances and explaining my vision for my community for a better future,” Catherine said.

Despite facing an uphill battle, Catherine remained steadfast. “I refused to hand out money which I did not have and instead urged voters to vote for me based on my track record and vision for the community. I also faced gender-based discrimination from some voters who believed that only men should lead,” Catherine narrated.

Looking ahead, Catherine has set her sights on bigger aspirations. She dreams of running for higher office, yearning to make an even greater impact on a regional or national scale. With her exemplary track record, she aims to inspire a new generation of leaders who will continue her legacy of progress and unwavering commitment to service.

With support from Hivos, Embassy of Ireland and the European Union, the IYWD is implementing interventions to upscale young women and women's participation, representation, and uptake of leadership positions in civic and political spaces through targeting elective and appointed positions from community to national levels.

Out and About



International Day of Rural Women

We joined forces with Institute for Young Women Development (IYWD) and General Agriculture and Plantation Workers' Union of Zimbabwe (GAPWUZ) to honor the women in the Hwedza rural community, and to recognize their critical role and contribution.



Out and About



International Day of Rural Women

The women participated in health and mental wellness sessions, before they competed in a few games that included 100m sprints and netball.





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We. The People

A Hivos publication